

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD AND SPECIFICATIONS**

EARLY SUCCESSIONAL HABITAT DEVELOPMENT/MANAGEMENT

(acre)
CODE 647

DEFINITION

Manage early plant succession to benefit desired wildlife or natural communities.

width) across the field on contour/cross-slope. Rotate the disked strips across the field. Other disking patterns can be used (within soil erosion limits) and will be limited to only one-third of the acreage treated in a year.

PURPOSE

- Increase plant community diversity.
- Provide wildlife habitat for early successional species.
- Provide habitat for declining species.

Use PRESCRIBED GRAZING (528A) to manipulate plant succession, reduce ground litter, and provide dusting areas. Livestock can be beneficial to maintaining the quality of herbaceous cover and controlling invasive plants when managed in accordance with a grazing plan with wildlife habitat management as the primary objective. This technique requires close management supervision to assure the site is not over-grazed.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On all lands that are suitable for the kinds of wildlife and plant species that are desired.

Use PRESCRIBED BURNING (338) to remove excess litter, which can reduce the quality of wildlife habitat. Controlled fire can allow germination of seed bearing annuals, increase plant species diversity, control unwanted woody cover, and open up the stand for movement of small animals and birds.

CRITERIA

Early successional management will be designed to achieve the desired plant community in density, vertical and horizontal structure, and plant species diversity needed by the featured wildlife species.

Use selective herbicides to manipulate plant succession and improve habitat diversity. Careful planning and care in application are required in the use of chemicals to improve existing habitat. Selection of a product should be based on several factors including product effectiveness, non-target species impacts, toxicological risks, and off-site movement of chemicals. See PEST MANAGEMENT (595) to determine a risk assessment.

Methods used will be designed to maintain soil and water quality criteria.

Used alone or in combination with other techniques, mechanical methods (prescribed burning, light disking, mowing, grazing, or a combination of the above) can successfully manipulate successional stages of habitat.

Light disking (2-4" deep) of existing stands may be necessary to increase the amount of open ground and encourage a diverse plant community of annual and perennial plants. Disk between October 1 and April 30. Alternate disked strips (less than or equal to 75' wide) with buffer strips (2 times the disked

Annual mowing or mowing of entire stands is discouraged since it greatly decreases plant diversity, and reduces residual cover available for the following nesting season. If mowing is necessary, two options are available. Mow between July 15 – August 15 to protect ground nesting wildlife and allow residual growth. Mow no more than one-third of the field and

rotate mowed strips across the field. Mow cool season grasses no shorter than 6 inches. Native warm season grasses should be mowed no shorter than 10 inches.

A second option for mowing would be strip mowing in the spring. Mowing between March 15 to May 1 will be most compatible with wildlife without greatly impacting ground nesting activities or loss of fall food plants. Mow no more than one-third of the field every year. Rotate mowed strips across the field every year.

If mowing is used as a habitat management practice, residues will be thoroughly shredded to prevent excess litter accumulation.

This practice should be applied periodically to maintain the desired early successional plant community. Vegetative manipulation must be done at least once every three years, or more frequently if the site requires treatment as recommended by NRCS biologist or other wildlife technical agency.

Native adapted plant materials will be encouraged through succession whenever possible, but some introduced species may provide adequate value depending upon habitat objectives.

Management practices and activities are not to disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species (May 1 – July 15). Exceptions will be allowed during this period for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community. Mowing may be needed during the plant establishment period to control undesirable plants.

Measures must be provided to control severe outbreaks of noxious weeds and other invasive species in order to comply with state noxious weed laws. Management measures shall be provided to control invasive species and noxious weeds on a “spot” basis.

To protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife and provide insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds shall be done on a “spot” basis.

CONSIDERATIONS

All habitat manipulations will be planned and managed according to soil capabilities and recommendations for management will maintain soil loss within tolerable limit (T).

Early successional treatments should be rotated throughout the managed area. It is desirable to treat one-third of the field every year.

Treatment may be applied whenever succession has gone past the desired stages as determined by NRCS biologist or other wildlife technical agency.

Managing for early successional plant communities is beneficial if not essential for less mobile animal species. The less mobile the species, the more important to provide all the habitat requirements in a small area.

Design and install the treatment layout to best facilitate operation of all machinery used on the strips or to make easily controlled burning boundaries. Whenever possible, lay out strips to have some multiple or full width passes by all farm implements.

This practice may be used to promote the conservation of declining species, including threatened and endangered (plant, wildlife or aquatic) species.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Actions shall be carried out to insure that this practice functions as intended throughout its expected life. These actions include normal repetitive activities in the application and use of the practice (operation), and repair and upkeep of the practice (maintenance).

Any use of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals to assure early successional management shall not compromise the intended purpose.

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